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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003016

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SUBJECT: IRAQ AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE FEARS CHILL IN
IRAQ-EGYPT RELATIONS

REF: BAGHDAD 2782

Classified By: Charge d' Affaires David M. Satterfield for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

11. (C/NF) SUMMARY: Iraq Ambassador-designate to Egypt, Safia al-Suhail, worries that Iraqi-Egyptian relations will chill unless the Iraqi government takes the initiative after the kidnapping and subsequent murder of the Egyptian Charge. Al-Suhail told PolOff July 18 that before this tragic incident, bilateral relations were on the upswing. The Iraqis are now waiting word from the Egyptians to travel to Cairo to deliver a condolence letter from President Talabani to President Mubarak. To al-Suhail, however, the Iraqi government is more interested in cultivating relations with Iran than with Sunni Arab countries and risks cooling its relations with Egypt. She also alleges that Iraqi Baathists in Cairo, including the former Iraqi Ambassador there, are lobbying the Egyptian government not to recognize the current Iraqi regime. Much of what al-Suhail perceives as misguided Iraqi focus is really disorganization in Baghdad and an inability of the Iraqi bureaucracy to pursue multiple initiatives at one time. Our encouragement of both governments not to succumb to the recent setback and to continue their efforts to improve their relationship will be helpful. END SUMMARY.

12. (C/NF) Long-time Embassy contact and Iraq Ambassador-designate to Egypt, Safia al-Suhail, warned PolOff July 18 that Iraqi-Egyptian relations could chill unless the Iraqi government takes the initiative to improve them after the July 2 kidnapping of the Egyptian Charge in Iraq, Ambassador Ihab al Sherif (Reftel). (Note: The Egyptian government announced July 7 that al-Sherif's captors, reportedly an al-Qaeda-affiliated group, had executed him. End Note). Al-Suhail explained that before this tragic incident occurred, the Egyptian government had granted her agreement, and she was preparing to travel to Cairo to assume her duties. (Bio note: Al-Suhail, a Shia Arab from the prominent al-Tamimi tribe, is the women's activist who attended the President's 2005 State of the Union address in Washington. Al-Suhail supports former PM Ayad Allawi, and she is critical of the current Iraqi government. Her husband, Baktiar Amin, who is a Sunni Kurd, was the Minister of Human Rights under the Allawi government. End Bio note.)

13. (C/NF) Al-Suhail related that President Talabani had asked her to deliver a condolence letter to his Egyptian counterpart Mubarak. The Iraqi Foreign Ministry had sent a dipnote to the Egyptian MFA requesting a suitable travel date to deliver the letter. The Egyptians had not given the Iraqis a date, and rather, asked them to wait awhile. In the meantime, the Egyptian Embassy in Baghdad had virtually closed its operations, leaving one employee to answer the phone. Iraqis requiring Egyptian visas must now travel to Amman, explained al-Suhail. The comments of some Iraqi officials suggesting that al-Sherif had possibly been killed "because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time," perhaps even meeting with insurgents, had drawn the ire of the Egyptians, she added.

14. (C/NF) Though Foreign Minister Zebari had assured al-Suhail he would contact the Egyptians again about the travel date, Zebari had left with the Prime Minister to Iran without doing so. Al-Suhail opined that the Iraqi government was more focused on Iranian ties than with relations with Egypt and other Sunni Arab countries. This lopsided approach would do little to assuage the fears of Sunni Arabs in Iraq and other countries that the current Iraqi government might ally with Iran to their detriment, she alleged.

15. (C/NF) Meanwhile, Iraqi Baathists residing in Cairo were lobbying the Egyptian government not to recognize the Iraqi government, asserted al-Suhail. She claimed that the head of this lobby effort is former Iraqi Ambassador Mohsen Khalil, who received political asylum in Egypt. Al-Suhail added that Mustapha Bakri, who heads an Egyptian opposition party and had supported Saddam Hussein, was also aiding Iraqi Baathists efforts to erode a still-delicate bilateral relationship. Al-Suhail observed that the Iraqi MFA's administrative undersecretary, Sa'ad al-Hayani, was in some way complicit with this Baathist lobby effort. He had stalled on her

agreement paperwork, she complained.

16. (C/NF) Comment: Some of what al-Suhail sees as conspiracy or misguided focus within the Iraqi government is, in fact, the result of bureaucratic disorganization in Baghdad. The Iraqi MFA, for example, takes few initiatives on even routine matters in the absence of Foreign Minister Zebari. The Prime Minister's office likewise has great trouble organizing itself to give guidance to the MFA. Thus, the PM's office can focus its work on a trip to Iran, but that process means its staffers will take no time on others issues such as, for example, repairing relations with Egypt. Nonetheless, from our perspective in Baghdad, al-Suhail's conclusion that the kidnapping and reported murder of the Egyptian Charge has chilled the fragile Iraqi-Egyptian bilateral ties appears correct. Our encouragement of both governments not to succumb to the recent setback and to continue seeking to improve their relationship will be helpful. It would be useful, for example, for the Egyptian MFA to encourage the Iraqis to send their delegation sooner rather than later. End Comment.

17. (U) REO HILLA, REO BASRA, REO MOSUL, and REO KIRKUK, minimize considered.
Satterfield